A SPIRITED CHRISTMAS

How Lethbridge celebrated Yuletide.

By

An Old Timer.

Yuletide festivities at Lethbridge reached an all-time high on a bright and frosty Christmas day back in 1907 when Mayor Galbraith addressed a message to the assembled townsfolk, counselling peace on earth and good will to all men.

Only his speech was backed up by a grim-faced detachment of Mounties in Sam Brown's and side arms, and a cordon of city police, all considerably out of breath. For they'd had a deal of strenuous and unlooked for exercise on top of hearty Christmas dinners. And all because two cowboys had acquired, literally and figuratively, an over-load of Xmas spirit! And the Mayor's address wasn't taken from the New Testament - it came directly from the Riot Act.

That morning Smoky Lee and Irish, from the Diamond-K ranch had careened into town on showy pintos, intent on a spot of celebration. Having mixed rye, scotch and "red eye" with rare impartiality, and straddled seats at Mah Wong's lunch counter, the temptation to try the steadiness of their hands by shooting roseate tomatoes out of the cans lining the shelves, became irresistable. Equall irresistable was the Celestial's wicked cleaver when it descended on Smoky's skull.

Beating a circuitous retreat with ~~xxx~~ his wounded companion Irish sent over his shoulder a sulphurous tirade at the Chinaman's unsportsman-like behaviour in resisting a harmless

display of animal spirits.

An hour later another cowboy from the same ranch hit town and, in answer to questions concerning the state of his friend who'd stopped the Chinaman's cleaver, replied laconically: "Oh! him - he's daid!"

Swiftly the grapevine carried word of the tragedy abroad. Soon a mob of wrathful citizens was milling around the cafe, intent on tearing things apart. Heavily fortified by festive jolts of "red eye" they playful attempts to demolish the cafe, and, incidentally, other parts of the town, to display their indignation was hammered by the sudden ~~xxxx~~ interference of Chief Parry and a squad of none too gentle Mounties.

Thoughtfully the latter brought along a combined ambulance, and "Black Maria" in the shape of a covered wagon. As protesting rioters were arrested and tossed inside it soon became obvious that the improvised patrol wagon had developed an astonishing elasticity in accomodating itself to the increasing load of prisoners. Then it was found that as the malcontents were loaded into the back they as promptly escaped from the front to join in the fracas.

It was at this moment, while the howling of the festive throng resembled a menagerie gone berserk, that the Mayor, hauled unceremoniously from a warm fireside and a contemplated cigar, appeared upon the scene with bristling whiskers.

His dignity very much hurt when friendly admonition was answered by jeers, catcalls and unkindly missles, he read the Riot Act and brought the noisy and destructive festivities to a close. Though no one had been seriously injured many sported

shiners and encarmined noses.

As things quietened down a bereaved friend of the defunct cowboy spurred his horse towards the Diamond-K ranch to arrange funaral plans. Halting at a roadside ranch where sounds of merriment sundered the frosty air he decided to drop in. To his amazement he observed, seated on an up-turned soap-box, the supposedly dead cowboy sawing merrily away at a concertina in the centre of the orchestra! Sure, admitted to a slight headache. He also bore an enormous "hen's egg" on his head - but otherwise, despite his contact with the blunt edge of Wong's cleaver, he was in reasonably good shape and certainly not ready for burial.

Apologies were extended to Mah Wong, reparations were duly made, and Lethbridge settled down to the even tenor of its way.